

**Working with children with different  
needs and abilities  
In  
Physical Development and Health**

Draft

# Physical Development and Health – children with different needs and abilities

A child may have difficulty moving, coordinating, balancing, or holding/releasing but you can structure play and activities to compensate for the child's physical difference. In all play and movement activities, be aware of the child's needs and interests and enter into the spirit of fun and respect for a child's achievement.

Young children with different motor abilities may need the opportunities to “move within the world” in a different perspective. They may be slower in attaining motor milestones, gaining strength, control, release, balance, and coordination. Children with multiple different needs find opportunities to develop large motor skills and enhance play through physical activities. Some children, such as those with autism or are hyperactive, benefit greatly from rigorous physical activity—jumping, running, and dancing.

No two children move their bodies and play in the same way. Teachers and parents are encouraged to choose play activities and games that provide the most success for each child – consider:

- Choosing activities that the child likes,
- Adapting, as needed, to the child's needs, and
- Organizing activities so that they are inclusive—child and his friends.

Children enjoy play. They like games that require teamwork, sharing, taking turns, and fantasy. Children who do not have different needs may learn from a single experience; many children with different needs may require repetition of many experiences before they learn from it. The environment in which the child plays is very important. Be aware of safety and health concerns at all times. Children on certain medications for seizures or other health conditions may be allergic to sunlight. Teachers must be knowledgeable of medications and side effects. Consider:

- **TIME.** Keeping play periods short—end before child gives out. Give time to explore.
- **COMFORT.** Keep the child comfortable and relaxed.
- **NOISE.** Be aware of excessive or distracting noises.
- **LIGHT.** Avoid glaring sunlight.
- **MOVEMENT.** Avoid quick movement.
- **WATER.** Warm water helps relax muscles.
- **UNDERSTANDING.** Physically guide or demonstrate if needed.
- **TOYS/ACTIVITIES.** Select toys and activities that encourage inclusion.

- **MODEL.** Guide, model, or join in the game.
- **ENCOURAGE.** Praise, accentuate the positive, and encourage to keep trying.
- **FUN.** Participate and be enthusiastic by your body actions and voice.
- **DESCRIBE.** Talk about lights, shapes, sizes, and rules.

You can help the child get the play and movement experiences he needs by adapting the physical environment. Children with motor impairments who have good cognitive skills may find computer skills are critical to their development in both academics and communication. Remember, if it isn't **FUN**, it isn't **PLAY**.

Some activities may need adaptations, others the child may find extremely difficult or not be able to participate in certain activities. Do **not** frustrate the child. Be aware of what the child needs to play and have fun:

What **POSITIONS** support and allow freedom?

What **EQUIPMENT** or modifications are needed?

What **ACTIVITIES** promote safe movement for the child?

Provide as many opportunities as possible for the child to enjoy play activities. Outside activities provide opportunities for developing social skills, addressing safety and accessibility, playing with outside equipment, and healthy, physical exercise.

Painting (fine motor) – Enjoy making pictures or patterns with hands, fingers, or feet.

#### Snapshots:

- Child can use feet or toes versus hands or fingers.
- Tape the paper to the table surface.
- Add salt or sand for a change of texture.

All children facing the challenge of different physical needs need to develop respect for themselves and independence. Assistive technology devices assist children with self-help skills and clothing/bathing adaptations support children in becoming independent. After basic health care needs are met, acceptance and encouragement are the next most basic needs of children with different abilities. We should never assume that a technology-dependent child cannot be included in the community.